FAIRS AND GATHERINGS

443 One may readily see how this came about, for these were the
437 times when the stock was gathered and sorted, and dues were paid to the overlords in cattle. In the ordinary business of the fair exchange and barter gave way in time to money transactions, but one has only to visit a cattle fair to sense that the noisy ritual of assessing values and the prolonged bargaining have come down from a time before the use of money was general. The vigorous hand-slapping by which bargains
[201] are sealed in tight-lipped silence could derive from the days when different languages were spoken at the fairs. Apart from the difference between English and Gaelic it should be remembered that in many districts pockets of non-Gaelic speech, perhaps even of non-Aryan tongues, survived well into the Christian era. Another interesting accompaniment of the con-
[777] cluded bargain is the piece of money, the luck penny, which the seller hands back to the purchaser as a gesture of independence when a price has finally been agreed on. Many a fight
[578] has begun because a buyer has been dissatisfied with the amount of his luck money. Similar bargaining took place when a servant was being hired for the half year, and he received his earles or earnest money as a sign that the contract was concluded, handing over to his employer his bundle of clothes in return.

543 The countryman will find any excuse for going to the fair,
[805] and it is his proud boast that he has seen so many fairs. It is by the fairs, and not by the calendar, that he measures time and dates important events in the life of the community. 'Their whole thought seems to be going to fairs and selling or exchanging', it was written of the Mayo peasantry in 1836,[1] and in the seventeenth century we find this comment on 'the inferior rank of husbandmen' in Westmeath: '(they) are very crafty and subtile in all manner of bargaining, especially in their dealings in fairs and markets'.[2] Your luck at the fair might depend
777 on the colour of the hair of the first person you met on the road,
543 and it was unlucky to be passed on the way, so that horsemen riding at full gallop were not merely trying out their paces for the races which followed. For good luck you should carry with

[1] P. Knight, *Erris in the Irish Highlands*, 104.
[2] Sir Henry Piers, *West-Meath*, 115.

[i.e. the seasons and rent days 260 dating from 1 May and 1 November. — Analyst]